

Minute Meetings as “Time to Talk”: Using Very Brief Individual Check-Ins to Support Academic and Career Planning for At-Risk Students

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Abstract: *Minute meetings – structured, 1- to 5-minute individual check-ins between school counselors and students – offer a scalable way to deliver individualized advisement, monitor academic and career goals and quickly triage social/emotional or logistical barriers for at-risk students. Grounded in the ASCA National Model® and ASCA Student Standards (academic, career, social/emotional domains), minute meetings can be integrated into a data-informed school counseling program as a form of advisement and brief counseling. This article describes the theoretical basis, a practical implementation used by Team Students at Myers Middle School (Time to Talk), suggested templates and question sets, data collection strategies and recommendations for practice and evaluation.*

Introduction

School counselors are charged to deliver systematic, data-informed services that support students’ academic achievement, college/career readiness, and social/emotional development (ASCA National Model). Traditional individual counseling is effective but resource-intensive; brief, frequent check-ins “minute meetings” allow counselors to reach more students, maintain continuity with those at risk, and intervene early when problems emerge. At Myers Middle School, Team Students used minute meetings (branded locally as Time to Talk) to check academic progress, discuss short-term career/aspiration goals, and identify students needing Tier-2 or Tier-3 support. This implementation aligns with ASCA’s emphasis on delivering services across the three domains and using advisement and appraisal to guide interventions.

Theoretical & Standards Basis

ASCA’s framework positions school counseling as integral to the school’s academic mission; counselors use the ASCA Student Standards (Mindsets & Behaviors) and the National Model’s define/manage/deliver/assess cycle to plan services. The Student Standards explicitly support delivering direct student services via instruction, appraisal/advise, and counseling across academic, career, and social/emotional domains—precisely where minute meetings operate as a brief advisement/counseling contact. Using the Student Standards to map meeting objectives helps ensure each minute meeting targets measurable competencies (e.g., academic perseverance behaviors, career awareness).

Evidence from practitioner literature and small studies suggests brief, structured contacts (e.g., Check-In/Check-Out, brief minute meetings, quick well-being surveys) can improve connectedness, surface issues early, and identify students who require more intensive supports. Minute meetings function as both relational touchpoints and data-gathering moments that feed the counselor’s needs assessment and intervention planning.

Minute Meetings: Definition & Goals

Definition. Minute meetings are brief (typically 1–5 minutes) one-to-one contacts between counselor and student using a short, consistent script or form. They may be scheduled periodically (weekly, biweekly, monthly) or used as rapid check-ins when concerns arise.

Primary goals:

1. Monitor academic progress and barriers (missing work, attendance, grades).
2. Review short-term career/aspiration steps and reinforce goal-directed behavior.
3. Screen for social/emotional or safety concerns requiring follow-up.
4. Strengthen counselor–student rapport and increase student sense of belonging.
5. Generate quick, actionable data to identify students for Tier-2/3 supports.

Implementation at Myers Middle School: A Time to Talk (Team Students)

Context & population. At Myers, minute meetings were embedded in the school counseling program as a targeted advisement strategy for students identified as at risk (attendance concerns, rapidly falling grades, behavioral referrals, or teacher referral). Team Students coordinated scheduling with teachers and built short windows into the school day (homeroom transitions, advisory, before/after school) to minimize instructional disruption. (Local implementation details drawn from Team Students at Myers.)

Typical protocol (30 students example):

- Pre-meeting: Counselor reviews basic data (grades, attendance, discipline) and selects 5–7 focused items for the meeting.
- Meeting script (1–3 minutes): quick greeting → two check questions (1 academic, 1 career/goal) → one rating (0–3) on current concern → immediate next step (e.g., “bring one assignment tomorrow,” or “we’ll meet for 15 min next week”) → note in data log.
- Post-meeting: counselor records a one-line outcome and triage code (OK, monitor, follow-up; Tier-2; urgent). Students with moderate concerns receive a brief follow-up appointment; urgent cases move into standard counseling or crisis protocol. (This is the Time to Talk model used at Myers.)

Example minute meeting questions:

1. How are your classes going this week? Any missing assignments?
2. What one thing will you do this week to move closer to your goal (pass math, make honor roll, try out for X)?
3. On a scale 0–3, how ready are you for next year’s classes/career idea? (0 = not ready, 3 = very ready)

These questions tie directly to ASCA’s academic and career domains and produce data that can be mapped to Student Standards.

Data Collection & Using Results

Minute meetings are only useful if documented and analyzed. Recommended data elements: student name/ID, date/time, triage code, short note (≤ 10 words), one numeric rating, and next step. Counselors can use simple spreadsheets or ASCA National Model templates to visualize caseload reach, trends, and referral throughput. Using aggregated minute meeting data helps the counseling team show reach (number of students served), impact (changes in ratings over time), and efficient identification of students needing more intensive services important for RAMP, school leadership, and equitable resource allocation.

Outcomes Observed & Anecdotal Impact (Myers)

At Myers, Team Students reported: increased rapport with formerly disengaged students, earlier identification of students needing supports (attendance, food insecurity, mental health referrals), and pragmatic academic gains when minute meetings included a single, explicit next step (e.g., “turn in math homework tomorrow”). Minute meetings also created a low-stakes venue for career conversations (students naming careers or trades, discussing high school course choices), laying groundwork for later, deeper career advisement. These findings align with research/practice literature that brief, consistent adult contact supports school engagement and behavior management.

Practical Considerations & Fidelity Tips

1. Consistency & brevity. Use a short script and a 1–5 minute max. Longer chats are fine but should be scheduled as follow-ups.
2. Data discipline. Record every meeting in a simple log with a triage code. Review logs weekly to catch trends.
3. Tiered response. Predefine what each triage code triggers (monitor, 15-minute follow-up, teacher contact, referral).
4. Privacy & consent. Be mindful of confidentiality—do not discuss sensitive issues in hallways; move to private space if risk emerges.
5. Equity. Use objective data to select students for minute meetings to avoid bias; rotate through caseloads so all students receive at least occasional check-ins.
6. Integration with ASCA. Map minute meeting learning objectives to ASCA Student Standards and report outcomes as part of the ASCA National Model deliver/assess cycle.

Limitations & Areas for Future Study

Minute meetings are not a replacement for in-depth counseling or therapy. They are a triage and advisement tool. Empirical studies of minute meetings are limited; more rigorous, controlled research is needed to quantify impact on grades, attendance, and postsecondary outcomes. Future research should compare frequency/duration models (e.g., weekly 1-minute vs. monthly 5-minute) and test fidelity tools. Practitioner action research (pre/post measures, matched comparison groups) is a practical next step for schools.

Conclusion & Recommendations for Practitioners

Minute meetings—used intentionally and documented systematically—offer a high-leverage, low-time investment method for school counselors to advance ASCA-aligned goals: keeping students on track academically, elevating career conversations, and quickly identifying social/emotional or logistical barriers. At Myers, Team Students' Time to Talk approach demonstrates that short, regular contacts can strengthen relationships with at-risk students and result in timely interventions. Counselors should adopt short scripts, log outcomes, align questions with ASCA Student Standards, and evaluate program impact with simple data dashboards.

References

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